

Memorandum

: Project File

Date : July 24, 1996

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From : California Energy Commission - Steve Munro *SM*
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento 95814-5512
Compliance Project Manager

Subject : SUMMARY OF MAY 2, 1996 STAFF WORKSHOP ON THE HARPER LAKE MARSHES AND IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION - SEGS VIII AND IX PROJECTS, 88-AFC-1 AND 89-AFC-1

A workshop was held on May 2, 1996, at the Victorville City Hall to discuss a request by Harper Lake Company VIII and Harper Lake Company IX, to amend Biological Resources Condition 5 of the SEGS VIII Commission Decision and Biological Resources Condition 11k. of the SEGS IX Commission Decision. The proposed amendment is to provide ground water to replenish the south and/or central Harper Lake Marshes/Wetlands. The following people attended the workshop:

Michael Gersick, Representing the Harper Lake Companies
Randy Scott, Constellation Operating Services
Jan Hansen, Constellation Operating Services
Jeff Ardahl, Bureau of Land Management
Tom Egan, Bureau of Land Management
Ken Carter, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
Ted Evans, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
Becky Jones, California Department of Fish and Game
Marc Sazaki, California Energy Commission
Steve Munro, California Energy Commission

I began the meeting by handing out a workshop agenda and providing a brief history of events leading to the current amendment request by the Harper Lake Companies (HLC). I explained that my goal for the workshop was to discuss all of the issues concerning the proposal to provide up to 75 acre feet per year of ground water to the central or southern Harper Lake Marsh, to identify the remaining steps necessary to finalize amendment language, and to implement the proposal as expeditiously as possible

Mr. Gersick expressed the Harper Lake Companies' desire to complete the amendment process and implement their proposal. He stated that HLC proposes that the conditions be written so that it is clear that once a proposal is accepted from HLC to provide water for the marsh, there will be no further testing requirements on the company in the future as long as 75 acre feet of water per year continue to be made available from the approved well. He also expressed concern about whether 75 acre feet per year of water would be sufficient to preserve the marsh if agricultural runoff in the area ceased.

Ken Carter of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board described water quality characteristics in the area of the marshes. He intended his comments to cover the general case in the absence of site-specific data. Mr. Carter stated that after testing ground water from the area on March 14, 1996 (using 5 ppb detection limit for selenium) and April 6, 1996 (using 1 ppb detection limit for selenium), it is now possible to sample well water in the area and determine whether it is consistent in quality with other ground water sources in the environs of the marshes. Water consistent with the general ground water quality in the area would not require an NPDES permit.

Mr. Carter explained that a principal reason that Harper Lake Marsh water quality has been maintained over the years, even with low quality agricultural runoff feeding into it, is that the marsh is periodically flushed into Harper Dry Lake during periods of heavy rainfall in the region. This is because the marsh is slightly elevated above the level of the dry lake bed. This periodic flushing has tended to renew marsh water quality over the years.

Mr. Carter also responded to Mr Gersick's question about the adequacy of 75 acre feet per year of water to preserve the marsh if no agricultural runoff were available. Mr. Carter indicated that 75 acre feet would be a significant amount of water, and that even without agricultural runoff, it would still be sufficient to maintain a significant portion of the marsh. Mr. Carter pointed out that if agricultural irrigation were to cease in the area, the water table would tend to rise thus benefitting the marsh. Mr. Carter also indicated that rainfall in the area would continue to provide significant runoff into the marsh.

There was some discussion about the purity of water with respect to the distance of a well from the marsh itself. Mr. Carter indicated that although the farther away from the marsh, the better the water quality, the tests cited above (as well as an attached April 25, 1996 retest of the March 14, 1996 samples, with selenium not detectable below 1 ppb concentration) indicate that water from a well located about 1 mile from the marsh was of acceptable quality so as not to require an NPDES permit.

Jeff Ardahl and Tom Egan of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) indicated their support for providing 75 acre feet per year of water to the south and/or central Harper Lake Marshes. They had some questions concerning the logistics of getting the water into the marsh and they also expressed their strong preference that there be sufficient flow capacity to enable the 75 acre feet of water to be drawn in a six-month period during the year rather than over the entire year recognizing that there is a greater need for water to the marshes during the warmest six months of the year.

In response to the BLM concerns, Mr. Gersick and Mr. Scott indicated that they would work with BLM to identify a well that would bring acceptable quality water to a point where it could be channeled into the marshes most effectively. BLM staff indicated that they will provide a map to Mr. Scott showing those locations which would be most advantageous in order to assist HLC in locating an acceptable well. With regard to the BLM's request to be able to draw the water over a six-month period rather than the entire year, Mr. Gersick stated that although he does not believe that this can be required of HLC, HLC would work with the BLM in an effort to provide a flow-rate which would satisfy the BLM's request.

Becky Jones of the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) stated her concurrence with the positions stated by the BLM and Lahontan staff. She said that CDFG supports the addition of well water to the marsh as long as the quality of the water is consistent with the quality of ground water in the area as confirmed by the tests provided by Lahontan.

The final part of the workshop involved reviewing some suggested language for the amendment which I had provided. Significant progress was made in redrafting that language in order to meet the needs of the parties. It was agreed that there would be an attempt to identify an acceptable well prior to completing the redrafting of the amendment language so that the conditions can reflect the specifics of that well.

Since the May 2, 1996 workshop, there have been further efforts to conclude the amendment to provide well water to the Harper Lake marshes. These efforts include a June 26, 1996 site visit to the marsh area to inspect potential wells in the area. The visit was attended by Jeff Ardahl and Tom Egan of the BLM, Jan Hansen of Constellation Operating services, the SEGS VIII & IX plant operators, Mark Sazaki and myself. The parties are continuing to cooperate to finalize amendment language to conclude the issue.

We have learned of important new information this week. Michael Gersick has been in contact with representatives of the Bank of America who are interested in providing support to the effort to supply water to the Harper Lake wetlands. They are the bank's environmental program manager and the land manager for the region which includes the Harper Lake Wetlands. A meeting to discuss the project with them has been arranged in Southern California on August 7, 1996. The meeting will also include Commission, BLM, and Lahontan RWQCB staff. The bank became interested due to a proposed federal project to construct public access and viewing facilities at the marshes for which \$300,000 in funding has been passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in a bill sponsored by Rep. Jerry Lewis (see attached newspaper article). The total amount for the project includes \$100,000 for parking and walkways and \$200,000 for five additional rangers. It is our hope that the bank's involvement will provide added impetus to the effort to complete the amendment and the project to provide additional water to the marshes.

Attachment

cc: Sally Rakow, Vice Chair
David A Rohy, Commissioner
Michael Gersick
James N. LaMont
Tom Egan
Ken Carter
Becky Jones
Bob Orcutt

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Harper Lake wetlands may get visitor facilities

By Karl Hejlik
Staff Writer

BARSTOW — Visitors to the Harper Lake wildlife area may benefit from improved facilities in coming years if plans made by the federal Bureau of Land Management become reality.

A proposal sponsored by U.S. Rep. Jerry Lewis allocates \$100,000 for the construction of hiking trails and parking facilities at Harper Lake. The funding was approved by the House of Representatives June 20.

"Improving visitor facilities at Harper Lake will result in an environmental showplace that will enhance tourism, create an out-

door classroom facility for students, and encourage greater public involvement in resource protection," said Lewis. R. Redlands, in a press release.

The proposal must now be approved by the Senate and be included in the federal budget.

"We've cleared the first hurdle and we're going to be watching these steps to make sure that money gets to the Barstow area," said Dave LesStrang, a spokesman for Lewis. "This is not a controversial issue and we're not expecting any problems, but it does have to go through the whole process."

Harper Lake, about 25 miles northwest of Barstow, consists of

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about 500 acres of wetlands that support diverse wildlife, including more than 250 species of birds. It is the largest marsh environment in the western Mojave Desert.

Tentative plans are focused on improving wildlife observation facilities at the marsh. Plans include a rock-lined trail, three concrete viewing platforms, a new parking lot and a boardwalk accessible to people with physical disabilities, said Jeff Aardahl, resources branch chief in the BLM's Barstow office.

Construction is expected to take about a year. No plans can be finalized until a federal budget is passed.

"We can't make any moves on spending that money until it is in hand from Congress. You never know when Congress will set its budget. History says it is very rarely before Christmas," Aardahl said.

An additional \$200,000 for five more rangers was also included in Lewis' proposal.